

**TOWN OF ACTON  
INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION  
TOWN MANAGER'S OFFICE**

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**DATE:** July 14, 2005

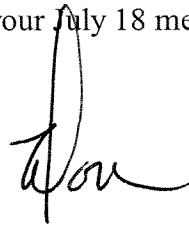
**TO:** Board of Selectmen

**FROM:** Don P. Johnson

**SUBJECT:** Town Manager's Annual Assessment

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Selectman Hunter has asked me to briefly explain to the Board that he asked me to undertake a bit different process with respect to my Annual Performance Assessment this year than in past years. He provided a copy of the form the Board has been using and requested that I start the process by preparing a draft self-assessment. The attached documents reflect my self-assessment and Selectman Hunter's final recommendation in that regard. Selectman Hunter will explain further at your July 18 meeting.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don", is positioned below the main text block.

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Dore' Hunter

**Sent:** Tuesday, July 12, 2005 3:33 PM

**To:** Don Johnson

**Subject:** Re: Town Manager's Draft Evaluation for '05

Don,

I have reviewed your covering letter, draft marks and comments on the marks and find that I concur, except in one instance where I have raised the numerical grade one half of a point.

I will speak with you on the telephone some time between now and the BOS meeting on 18 July about a potential wage adjustment. I will, of course, recommend that the Board again extend the term of your contract by an additional year, such that it will run three years from 1 July 2005.

Regards,

Dore' Hunter

Silver Bay, NY tel: 518-543-6953

Email: DoreHunter@aol.com

**ACTON TOWN MANAGER'S ANNUAL ASSESSMENT, 2005**

**(7/11/05)**

Dore':

You have asked that I assess my own performance for the year ended June 30, 2005. I have thought about this a great deal in the several weeks since you asked me to do so, and I find that there are several prefaces/caveats that I think would be appropriate before I get to the actual review form itself.

First, I want to take this opportunity to restate what I have said on numerous occasions before ... working for the Acton Board of Selectmen is an honor and a pleasure. Few who share this profession ever have the opportunity to work for such an exceptional group of individuals. I have had that privilege for 19 years and hope to complete my career with the same level of mutual respect and appreciation that the Board and I have shared throughout this time.

I believe it goes without saying that we are, or should be, our own worst critics. No one knows us better. If we are honest with ourselves, we know our shortfalls better than anyone else. Certainly that is the case with me. Similarly, if we have done any serious analysis of our strengths, we probably know those as well. I am a little more hesitant here, though, because I believe there are many times when our strengths may be more apparent to an impartial outsider than they are to us. In my particular case there is an additional characteristic that makes a shared self-assessment all the more difficult. My parents taught me never to "blow my own horn", encouraging me instead to always do the best that I knew I could, such that I would have no regrets about my efforts, and then let others evaluate how well they thought I had done. It may sound immodest but, whether or not someone else's opinion of my work and efforts is what I would want it to be is far less important to me than whether I am personally satisfied with what I have done. I have always competed against myself. This philosophy has served me well over the years and is engrained into my personality. Consequently, I have had some difficulty in coming to terms with your request. I want to be fair to myself and my family but I also do not want to put my opinion of my performance ahead of someone else's. After all, as I said above, I try always to do the best job I can and I generally come away feeling that I have done so. Whether or not that performance measures up to the expectations of others is a subjective evaluation for them to make. Goodness knows, in 19 years of service to the Board of Selectmen, I have had more than a few opportunities to have that point driven home to me.

Obviously, I would love to be marked at the highest possible level in every category but, if left to my own evaluation, for public consumption, I would probably mark every category at the middle level. This comes from the total consideration of the factors noted above, combined with a natural sense of insecurity that I carry around.

All of that having been said, I have given considerable thought as to the best way to approach this endeavor. I have concluded that it might be most beneficial to work directly from your last review of me. As you are well aware, each year I am reviewed by a different individual who brings different interests, expectations and perspectives to the review. Furthermore, these reviews can be skewed by particular events or incidents during the year, sometimes known only to the Chairman and myself. Comparing against your last review will help to smooth out those types of inconsistencies and afford an opportunity for point/counterpoint. To that end, I have taken the liberty of adding the designations you made the last time and have left your comments in tact. (Where you were particularly generous, I certainly would not want to quibble with your astute observations.) For clarity, I have added my own suggestions and comments in brackets and italics.

Regards,  
Don

## ACTON TOWN MANAGER'S ANNUAL ASSESSMENT

### 1. PERFORMANCE OF DUTY: The Manager's ability to manage and to get things done

#### a. Planning and Preparedness

1 - Got caught by the unexpected, appeared to be controlled by events. Set vague or unrealistic goals. Used unreasonable criteria to set priorities and deadlines. Rarely had plan of action. Failed to focus on relevant information.

2 - Mostly prepared.

3 - Consistently prepared. Set high but realistic goals. Used sound criteria to set priorities and deadlines. Used quality tools and processes to develop action plans. Identified key information. Kept Selectmen, stakeholders and citizens appropriately informed.

4 - Occasional outstanding preparation.

**X** 5 - Consistent exceptional preparation. Always looked beyond immediate events or problems. Skillfully balanced competing demands. Developed strategies with contingency plans. Assessed all aspects of problems, including underlying issues and impact.

Not observed.

*[I agree with your rating. My strong feeling is that we can never be too prepared. I appreciate this acknowledgment of the preparation that John and I try to put into everything we do. We are almost driven in this regard. Frankly, our compulsion to try to be prepared for every eventuality often gets in the way of getting more done.]*

#### b. Using Resources

1 - Concentrated on unproductive activities or often overlooked critical demands. Failed to use people productively. Did not follow up. Mismanaged information, money or time. Used ineffective tools or left subordinates without means to accomplish tasks. Employed wasteful methods.

2 - Mostly an effective manager.

3 - Effectively managed a variety of activities with available resources. Delegated, empowered and followed up. Skilled time manager, budgeted own and subordinates' time productively. Ensured subordinates had adequate tools, materials, time and direction. Cost conscious, sought ways to cut waste.

4 - Occasionally unusually skilled manager.

**X** 5 - Unusually skilled at bringing scarce resources to bear on the most critical of competing demands. Optimized productivity through effective delegation, empowerment, and follow-up control. Found ways to systematically reduce cost, eliminate waste, and improve efficiency.

Not observed.

*[I agree with your rating although I feel a bit guilty taking credit here. The truth is that we have had no other choice. We have had totally insufficient funding and personnel to get the job done but failure has never been an option. This leaves only one alternative. We have no choice but to do more with less. The great advantage we have had in this squeeze has been the willingness of the outstanding members of our staff to step up to, and conquer, the challenge. This one really goes to our staff.]*

c. **Results/Effectiveness**

1 - Routine tasks accomplished with difficulty. Results often late or of poor quality. Work had a negative impact on department or unit. Maintained the status quo despite opportunities to improve.

2 - Handles the routine jobs.

3 - Gets the job done in routine situations and in many unusual ones. Work was timely and of high quality; required the same of subordinates. Results had a positive impact on department or unit. Continuously improved services and organizational effectiveness.

4 - Often provided outstanding work.

X 5 - Maintained optimal balance among quality, quantity, and timeliness of work. Quality of own and subordinates work surpassed expectations. Results had a significant positive impact on Town. Established clearly effective systems of continuous improvement.

Not observed.

*[I unabashedly feel that this organization has moved mountains and produced results far beyond anyone's reasonable right to expect. To the extent that I sit in the Manager's seat, I am proud to receive the acknowledgment but, just as in the preceding paragraph, the credit goes to the willingness of outstanding members of our staff to step up to, and conquer, the challenge. I simply hang on for the ride ... and what a ride it has been!]*

d. **Adaptability**

1 - Unable to gauge effectiveness of work or make adjustments when needed. Overlooked or screened out new information. Overreacted or responded slowly to change in direction or environment. Ineffective in ambiguous, complex or pressured situations.

2 - Generally effective.

3 - Receptive to change, new information and technology. Effectively used benchmarks to improve performance and service. Monitored progress and changed course as required. Effectively dealt with pressure and ambiguity. Facilitated smooth transitions.

X 4 - Often skillful.

5 - Rapidly assessed and adjusted to changing conditions, new information and technology. Very skilled at using and responding to measurement indicators. Championed organizational improvements. Effectively dealt with extremely complex situations. Turned pressure and ambiguity into constructive forces for change.

Not observed.

*[This is one of those categories where I accept your astute observation. In fact, I have difficulty with change and, except where necessary, would prefer to maintain the status quo. For this reason, John Murray has been a real asset to me. John goes the other way and would change everything. Between the two of us there is a great deal of pushing and shoving that generally produces an even balance of good, worthwhile change. Change to which I can adapt.]*

e. **Professional Competence**

1 - Questionable competence and credibility. Expertise lacking in key areas. Made little effort to grow professionally. Used knowledge as power against others or bluffed rather than acknowledging ignorance. Effectiveness reduced due to limited knowledge of own organizational role or Selectmen/citizen needs.

2 - Mostly competent and credible authority.

3 - Competent and credible authority on Town issues. Acquired and applied expertise to assigned duties. Showed professional growth through education, training and professional reading. Shared knowledge and information with others clearly and simply. Understood own organizational role and Selectmen/citizen needs.

4 - Often superior performance.

X 5 - Superior expertise; advice and actions showed great breadth and depth of knowledge. Remarkable grasp of complex issues, concepts and situations. Rapidly developed professional growth beyond expectations. Vigorously conveyed knowledge directly resulting in increased staff productivity. Insightful knowledge of own role, Selectmen/citizen needs, and value of work.

Not observed.

Comments:

Don is a skillful executive whose dedication to the Town of Acton over many years is unquestioned. He is well able to anticipate, define and attack a problem in an effective manner such that he is most often able to offer the Board of Selectmen or others a solution almost as soon, if not when, the problem first reaches the Board's attention. As applied to him the title "Manager" is unusually appropriate.

*[Thank you for your comments. I am from the old school that encourages dedication and loyalty – or go work for someone for whom you can have such allegiance. Your comments about being able to offer solutions go, in my mind, back to the preparation issue. I firmly believe that we make our own luck. By that, of course, I mean that we prepare well in order to be ready to capitalize on circumstances when they occur. John and I often talk of having been lucky during a Selectmen's meeting because we just got the answer to the unexpected question two hours before the meeting. In reality, we were "lucky" to have been prepared. Finally, I sincerely thank you for the "Manager" comment. It means a great deal to me.]*

**2. COMMUNICATION SKILLS: The Manager's ability to communicate in a positive and clear manner**

**a. Speaking and Listening**

1 - Unable to effectively articulate ideas and facts; lacked preparation, confidence or logic. Uses inappropriate language or rambled. Nervous or distracting mannerisms detracted from message. Failed to listen carefully or was too argumentative.

2 - Generally effective in expressing ideas.

3 - Effectively expressed ideas and facts in individual and group situations; non-verbal actions consistent with spoken message. Communicated to people at all levels to ensure understanding. Listened carefully for intended message as well as spoken words.

4 - Often articulates well.

X 5 - Clearly articulated and promoted ideas; accomplished speaker in both formal and extemporaneous situations. Adept at presenting complex or sensitive issues. Active listener, remarkable ability to listen with open mind and identify key issues.

Not observed.

*[I place a great deal of importance, on a daily basis, on the entire "Communication" category. To my mind, we each bring our personal capabilities and expertise to the job everyday but, if we cannot communicate, there are few applications for our skills ... especially in this business. When I first entered the workforce I was employed by a sales organization. The very first thing they taught me was that my communications, written or oral, were only as good as the message that was understood by the recipient. I try to keep that in mind when I speak and write. The other lesson that I have learned over the years is that we all too often communicate with the assumption that the other party has the same information and understanding that we*

have. That is generally not the case and it is frequently the point where communications fail. For this reason I generally try to err on the side of providing too much information, sometimes to the chagrin of the listener/reader.]

b. **Writing**

1 - Written material frequently unclear, verbose or poorly organized. Seldom proofread. Often submitted documents which were grammatically incorrect, tailored to wrong audience or delivered by an inappropriate medium.

2 - Writings generally satisfactory.

3 - Written material clear, concise and logically organized. Proofread conscientiously. Documents grammatically correct, tailored to audience, and delivered by an appropriate medium. Subordinates material reflected same high standards.

4 - Often persuasive.

X

5 - Clearly and persuasively expressed complex or controversial material directly contributing to stated objectives. Actively educated subordinates in effective writing.

Not observed.

Comments:

Don communicates extremely well. His writing and speaking are clear, organized, sensible and persuasive. Furthermore he has a very well developed sense of when and how he should present his views and advice. My mark here is 4.5, only because I have not had an opportunity to observe Don working on subordinate's writing skills.

*[This is one of the categories that I think you mentioned during my last review where the numerical "rating" does not, in my mind, properly coincide with the text. I am pleased with the "4" but, frankly, feel the text is less indicative of higher quality than that in paragraph #3. I guess if we can assume that #4 builds on and subsumes #3, then I am comfortable. The truth is that the mere fact that my writing ability is so important to my career speaks to me of our lack of understanding when we are young as to what will ultimately be important in our lives. Throughout my schooling I detested composition and writing. I was sure, as an engineer, that I would never need those skills and that my time was being wasted. Little do we know.]*

3. **LEADERSHIP SKILLS: The Manager's ability to support, develop, direct and influence others' work**

a. **Looking Out For Others**

1 - Seldom recognized or responded to needs of people, left outside resources untapped despite apparent need. Ignorance of individuals' capabilities increased chance of failure. Seldom recognized or rewarded deserving subordinates.

2 - Generally supportive of others.

3 - Cared for people. Recognized and responded to their needs; referred to outside resources as appropriate. Considered individuals' capabilities to maximize opportunities for success. Consistently recognized and rewarded deserving subordinates.

4 - Occasionally outstanding leader.

X

5 - Always accessible. Enhanced overall quality of life. Actively contributed to achieving balance among Town requirements, professional and personal responsibilities. Strong advocate for subordinates; ensured appropriate and timely recognition, both formal and informal.

Not observed.

*[I try to be accessible, often to my own detriment. Interruptions abound in my office but I do not want any employee, Selectman or citizen to think they are not important enough for my attention so, we have interruptions. Some on my staff have figured out that they can access me more easily after 5:00 PM so, we have more interruptions. As for advocacy, I am proud to advocate for our people. They are extremely capable and dedicated and I am honored to work with them.]*

**b. Developing Others**

1 - Unreasonably restricted opportunities for professional growth, kept others in narrow roles and discouraged the level of risk-taking necessary for learning. Lack of timely feedback left subordinates guessing.

2 - Generally provided opportunities for subordinates to grow.

3 - Supported and provided opportunities for professional growth. Encouraged others to expand their roles, handle important tasks and learn by doing. Allowed the appropriate level of risk-taking necessary for learning and mission accomplishment. Provided timely praise and constructive feed back.

**X** 4 - Often effective in fostering professional development.

5 - Created challenging situations which optimized professional development and maximized opportunity for success. Guided, coached and encouraged others to reach new levels of performance. Adeptly counseled others; identified professional potential, strengths and areas for improvement.

Not observed.

*[This category has proven to be a disappointment to me. For a variety of reasons – mostly related to undermanned departments, overworked staff and under-funded budgets - we have not been able to develop strong professional development programs. In the early years of my tenure as Manager, we were able to fund and foster a significant amount of professional development. After the bottom fell out in 1989, however, we were never able to regain enough budgetary position to be effective in this area. Witness the fact that John and I hardly ever attend conferences anymore. This is not an indication that we think we have had enough professional development, it is purely a budget-driven decision. We do what we can within the budgetary constraints and I thank you for the relatively high ranking, given those constraints.]*

**c. Directing Others**

1 - Showed difficulty in directing or influencing others. Low or unclear work standards reduced productivity. Failed to hold subordinates accountable for shoddy work or irresponsible actions. Unwilling to delegate authority to increase efficiency of task accomplishment.

2 - Often earned others' support and commitment.

**X** 3 - A leader who earned others' support and commitment. Set high work standards; clearly articulated job requirements, expectations and measurement criteria; held subordinates accountable. When appropriate, delegated authority to those directly responsible for the task.

4 - Occasionally inspirational leader.

5 - An inspirational leader who motivated others to achieve results not normally attainable. Won people over rather than imposing will. Clearly articulated vision; empowered subordinates to set goals and objectives to accomplish tasks. Modified leadership styles to best meet changing situations.

Not observed.



*[I would like to take exception with you here and argue for a higher rating. The truth is, though, I think you have it about right. I do not see myself as inspirational. Indeed, I am a hands-on type of person who is much more comfortable leading by example than inspiration. I strongly believe that I should not ask our personnel to do something I would not do. As a result, I wind up doing a lot of mundane things that a truly inspirational leader would not. I accept your rating and acknowledge it as "who I am".]*

d. **Teamwork**

1 - Used teams ineffectively or at wrong times. Conflicts mismanaged or often left unresolved, resulting in decreased team effectiveness. Excluded team members from vital information. Stifled group discussions or did not contribute productively. Inhibited cross-functional cooperation to the detriment of the Town.

2 - Often used teams effectively.

3 - Skillfully used teams to increase staff effectiveness, quality and service. Resolved or managed group conflict, enhanced cooperation, and involved team members in the decision process. Valued team participant. Effectively negotiated work across functional boundaries to enhance support of broader mutual goals.

4- Very skillful team builder.

X 5 - Insightful use of teams raised staff productivity beyond expectations. Inspired high level of esprit de corps, even in difficult situations. Major contributor to team effort. Established relationships and networks across a broad range of people and groups, raising accomplishments of mutual goals to a remarkable level.

Not observed.

*[I am very proud of your assessment here. Whether it is apparent or not, teamwork is what we are all about. The folks we call "staff" are, for the most part, a cohesive, loyal, caring, supportive, dedicate bunch whose sum is far greater than the parts. If I am accused of anything let it be teambuilding. Thank you.]*

e. **Workplace Climate**

1 - Intolerant of individual differences, exhibited discriminatory tendencies toward others. Tolerated or contributed to an uncomfortable or degrading environment. Failed to take responsibility for own words and actions and their impact on others.

2 - Generally sensitive of others, complies with anti-discrimination statues and regulations.

3 - Sensitive to individual differences. Encouraged open communication and respect. Promoted an environment which values fairness, dignity, creativity, and diverse perspectives. Took responsibility for own words and actions and the impact on others.

X 4 - Very sensitive to individual differences.

5 - Excelled at creating an environment of fairness, candor, and respect among individuals of diverse backgrounds and positions. Optimized use of different perspectives and opinions.

Not observed.

*[I would like to quibble here but, again, I think you have it about right.]*

Comments:

Leadership can be a difficult trait to evaluate directly when the evaluators are the group to which Don reports, and thus generally speaking are not "led" by Don. However, the indirect observations as to how Don's staff performs and their attitudes while

performing under his direction suggest that his leadership abilities are quite good. The staff retreats “On the Hill” which he conceived and leads each year to a consensus on the allocation of anticipated financial resources in order to present his budget recommendations demonstrate a well developed ability to lead a group to a common goal.

*[Thank you for your comments. As I noted above, I have always seen myself as a hands-on person, leading by example. I am aware that I am often seen as being too restrictive and controlling, not allowing my department heads enough freedom. I have never quite figured out where that comes from because, in my mind, I give my department heads a great deal of latitude to run their operations as they see fit. (Perhaps my lack of understanding is a sign of a deeper problem that we haven't talked about.) In the final analysis, though, I am held accountable for what they do and how they do it. Consequently, I do spend a significant amount of time trying to be sure they are carrying out the Town's mission, with the proper professionalism. I do not, and never have, considered that as micromanaging. I could be wrong.]*

#### **4. PERSONAL QUALITIES: Selected qualities illustrating the Manager's character**

##### **a. Initiative**

1 - Postponed needed action. Implemented or supported improvements only when directed to do so. Showed little interest in career development. Feasible improvements in methods or services went unexplored.

2 - Occasionally initiated improvements.

3 - Championed improvement through new ideas, methods, and practices; self-starter. Anticipated problems and took prompt action to avoid or resolve them. Sought opportunities for own career development. Pursued productivity gains and enhanced staff performance by applying new ideas and methods.

4 - Generally pro-active.

**X** 5 - Aggressively sought out additional responsibility. A self-learner. Made worthwhile ideas and practices work when others might have given up. Extremely innovative. Optimized use of new ideas and methods to improve work processes, decision-making, and service delivery.

Not observed.

*[This clearly describes my feeling about myself and our staff. My team prides itself as always being on the cutting edge. Again, though, this is not an individual thing. There is a whole team that is constantly looking to keep us ahead of the pack.]*

##### **b. Judgment**

1 - Decisions often displaced poor analysis. Failed to make necessary decisions, or jumped to conclusions without considering facts, alternatives and impact. Did not effectively weigh risk, cost and time considerations.

2 - Occasionally displays good judgment.

3 - Demonstrated analytical thought and common sense in making decisions. Used facts, data and experience and considered the impact of alternatives. Weighed risk, cost and time considerations. Made sound decisions promptly with the best available information.

4 - Often exhibits superior judgment.

**X** 5 - Combined keen analytical thought and insight to make appropriate decisions. Focused on the key issues and most relevant information, even in complex situations. Did the right thing at the right time. Actions indicated awareness of impact and implications of decisions on others.

Not observed.

*[I try always to bring the best judgment that I can to any problem. I have been blessed (some would say "lucky") that, more often than not, that judgment has been correct. It could be luck ... but we have already talked about that.]*

c. **Responsibility**

1 - Actions demonstrated questionable ethics or lack of commitment. Tolerated indifference or failed to hold subordinates accountable. Allowed organization to absorb personnel problems rather than confronting them as required. Tended not to speak up or get involved. Provided minimal support for decisions contrary to his own ideas.

2 - Generally supported Town/Selectmen policies.

3 - Held self and subordinates personally and professionally accountable. Spoke up when necessary, even when expressing unpopular positions. Supported all organizational policies and decisions which may have been counter to his own ideas. Committed to the successful achievement of Town goals.

4 - Often able to successfully implement unpopular decisions.

X 5 - Integrity and ethics beyond reproach. Always held self and subordinates to highest standards of personal and professional accountability. Did the right thing even when it was difficult. Succeeded in making even unpopular policies or decisions work. Actions demonstrated unwavering commitment to achievement of Town goals.

Not observed.

*[If there is any quality or characteristic that I would want the world to know about me, this is it. There is no characteristic in my personal makeup that is more important to me.]*

Comments:

Don has the highest degree of integrity. He is honest and straightforward. He follows directives presented to him to the letter and supports the spirit in which such are generated, even when such directives are substantively contrary to his advice or position. Don conducts himself strictly as everyone's Town Manager, whether or not he agrees with their view point. He can be utterly depended upon to keep a confidence.

*[The philosophy with which I undertook this position 19 years ago was that I would be everyone's Town Manager. Every citizen of this town deserves that. By virtue of my position, I enjoy a particular advantage in having my views heard. To the extent they are accepted, that is great. To the extent that they are not, it is my responsibility- and my staff's - to carry out the directives as if they were my preference. I have always known that if the day came when I could not carry out the Board's and Town Meeting's directives, it would be time to move on. Thankfully, that day has never come and I hope it never will. Acton is a wonderful place to work. I deeply appreciate the opportunity to hold a position of importance here.]*

Submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_

Immediate Past Chairperson  
F. Doré Hunter

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved (as modified) by the Board of Selectmen

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson